

Tuition assistance top-up

GI Bill can pay member's share when using tuition assistance

(Extracted from VA Circular 22-01 dated Feb. 1)

Public Law 106-398 authorized the Veterans Administration to pay the 25 percent of tuition for voluntary education courses that is not paid through tuition assistance. This program is known as Tuition Assistance Top-up or Top-off.

To be eligible applicants must meet two requirements:

- Eligible to receive Chapter 30 (Montgomery GI Bill) benefits. This means that a person must meet the chapter 30 basic eligibility requirements and be either a veteran or have served at least 24 months if still on active duty.

- Receive tuition assistance from the military (Coast Guard). Applicants must receive TA from their military component for the course or courses for which they're claiming Top-up. Any course for which TA is approved by the Coast Guard Institute is approved for Top-up payments.

The effective date for the provisions of this law is Oct. 30, 2000. The Tuition Assistance Top-up benefit is available for terms that begin on or after Oct. 30, 2000. The Top-up program is not available to reservists who are covered by Chapter 1606. Tuition Assistance Top-up is not

additional tuition assistance. It is a Chapter 30 benefit. The payment is made to the individual claimant, not to the institution. It is made in one lump-sum payment.

Limits

The Top-up benefit is payable for 36 months of courses. This is separate from months of basic entitlement to chapter 30 benefit payments.

Chapter 30 basic months of entitlement are not affected by Top-up payments. Top-up "entitlement" is not adjusted by training time. If Top-up payment is made for a course, the Top-up entitlement is reduced by the length of the course regardless of how much the Top-up payment is. For example, if the course is three months long, the Top-up entitlement charge is three months, whether the amount of payment is \$1,950 or 450. The claimant would, however, still have 36 months of entitlement for "regular" chapter 30 benefits.

MGIB rate reduction: If TA Top-up has been paid, the full-time monthly rate of MGIB benefits to which the individual would normally be entitled is subsequently reduced by the amount of the total Top-up payment divided by 36. For example, if a person who would normally be entitled to a full-time rate of \$650 per month

had received a total of \$3,600 in Top-up benefits, the person's full-time monthly rate would be reduced by \$100 per month to \$550 for subsequent enrollments, whether as an in-service or veteran claimant.

Previous duplication of benefit provisions still apply to TA and MGIB benefits. A person cannot receive "normal" MGIB monthly benefits for the same course for which TA is received. Therefore, the VA cannot award MGIB benefits and pay Tuition Assistance Top-up for the same course.

Application procedures

Original claims: Top-up can be paid only to people who are eligible to receive chapter 30 benefits.

Students who have not previously filed a claim for MGIB should do the following:

- Request TA from the CG Institute. Submit CG Form 4147 via the Education Services Officer at least three weeks prior to the start date of the class.
- File the TA approval form along with their VA Form 22-1990. This form is available from the VA web site at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/educationforms.htm.
- Indicate Top-up on the 22-1990 in item 1A under the MGIB-Active Duty block.

Students who have previously filed a claim for MGIB should simply submit their signed TA approval form.